

Dilwyn C of E Primary School - Responses to Statutory Notice to close

67 responses were received. The following table sets out the main themes contained in responses, with the evidence provided and commentary. Figures in the response column indicate the number of letters that explicitly mentioned the issue concerned. There were overlaps in the points raised.

Response	Claimed evidence	CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIRECTORATE Response
Statutory guidelines have been ignored. (5)	That the Children & Young People's Directorate has acted improperly by announcing an intention to close the school some years ago. This has resulted in parents sending their children to other schools because of the threat of closure.	<p>As part of a county-wide review of schools, in January 2008, the Children & Young People's Directorate proposed the amalgamation of Weobley, Dilwyn and Canon Pyon primary schools on the Weobley school site. Across the county, the review proposed the amalgamation of 34 schools in total.</p> <p>In January 2007, Dilwyn had 43 pupils on roll. In January 2008 the school had 36 pupils on roll. It is true to say that pupil numbers have declined since January 2008, but numbers had already declined to the threshold for review under the Council's Small Schools' Policy.</p> <p>During the consultation (February to April 2010) responses from parents living in the Dilwyn catchment area, and whose children were attending other schools, gave a number of reasons for their positive choice of alternative school, including ease of access, before/after school care and private education. No parents said that a perceived threat of closure was the reason they had</p>

	<p>The Children & Young People's Directorate has ignored plans for increased housing in North Herefordshire; shortage of primary school places in the West Midlands and increasing workforce at a local employer - Tyrrells.</p>	<p>chosen an alternative school. During the consultation, the Parish Council conducted its own questionnaire of residents. Again, no parents said that they had chosen an alternative school because they were concerned about closure of Dilwyn.</p> <p>The Governors now state that they have written statements from parents of 13 of 34 children from the Dilwyn catchment area not attending Dilwyn, that their decision to choose another school was influenced by the threat of closure. Governors have not shared details with the Children & Young People's Directorate.</p> <p>Some authorities in the West Midlands, predominantly in urban areas, are experiencing a shortage of primary school places. This is not the case in North Herefordshire. Dilwyn and other local and cluster schools have 146 (15%) surplus places.</p> <p>Dilwyn is identified as a main village in the Local Development Framework. There are approximately 123 residential dwellings in the main village. Any new housing would have regard to the size of the current residential community. The Parish Council is liaising with Herefordshire planning officers on the possible development of land which may</p>
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	<p>Schools should only be closed as a last resort: Insufficient weight given to the Government's presumption against the closure of a rural school. No strong reasons to close Dilwyn, particularly given moves to federate with St Mary's. Children & Young People's Directorate must provide diversity, choice and a system shaped by parents. Arguable that to close when school stands an excellent chance of securing a viable future through federation would be illegal.</p>	<p>accommodate around 25 houses, of which 50% would be affordable. On average, a development of this size, with a mixture of 2, 3 and 4 bed properties, is likely to yield around 5 primary aged children.</p> <p>There is a government presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a village school should never close, but the case for closure should be strong and any proposals clearly in the best interests of the educational provision for the children now and in the future. Standards at a school need to be taken into account, as does the likely affect of closure on the community.</p> <p>There are sufficient places in other schools in the area, including other Church of England schools to enable many parents to exercise choice. There are 34 pupils within Dilwyn C of E Primary School's catchment area who are going to other schools.</p>
<p>Council would breach statutory obligations if it did not allow the innovative plan for an ecumenical federation to be implemented. This option should be pursued. (3)</p>	<p>No evidence provided.</p>	<p>The Council has followed the statutory regulations. In determining the future of the school, the Council must consider federation as an option and must consider any federation proposals. The Children & Young People's Directorate, the Hereford diocese and Archdiocese of Cardiff have each</p>

		<p>considered the revised business plan for federation with St Mary's RC High School.</p> <p>The Local Authority is supported by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cardiff in its views that Dilwyn C of E Primary School is not sustainable as a stand-alone entity and that the revised proposal to federate with St Mary's Roman Catholic (RC) High School has addressed some of the concerns of the Local authority and diocesan bodies, but does not address sufficiently the issue of low pupil numbers, resulting finances and therefore sustainability of quality education and experience into the future. The Diocese of Hereford Board of Education, though it has some reservations, supports the proposal.</p>
<p>The Children & Young People's Directorate and councillors believe standards of teaching and learning would be better in a larger school. It was stated that children are happier, more confident, and achieve better results in a small school. (7)</p>	<p>Statistical evidence gathered by the National Association of Small Schools that small schools produce better results.</p> <p>Claim that no evidence that the standard of teaching and learning at Weobley Primary School, the named successor school, is any better than at Dilwyn.</p>	<p>The Cabinet report of 12 July 2010 recognised the statistical evidence that small schools often produce markedly better results, but after adjusting for socio-economic factors, these differences are marginal.</p> <p>Weobley Primary School was inspected by Ofsted in October 2010. It has been judged to be a good school overall with the standard of teaching and learning judged as good with some outstanding features. This is not necessarily reflective of the size of the school, but Ofsted have also judged as good the school's capacity to improve further.</p>

<p>Questions regarding the financial rationale. Closure will result in little or no economies (14)</p>	<p>Claim that this is recognized by the Children & Young People's Directorate; any savings will make little difference when spread across all schools; children will go to other schools which attract the small schools supplement; all small village facilities cost more per head.</p>	<p>There would be no savings made to the Local Authority in terms of the school's delegated budget. The 'per pupil' funding element would follow each pupil to the school to which they transfer. The other elements of the budget such as the management and premises base allocations and small schools' protection funding, around £60,000, would be distributed between all schools through the Herefordshire schools funding formula.</p> <p>The Dilwyn school budget would therefore be reinvested, partly in the schools to which Dilwyn C of E Primary School pupils transfer and, in part, across all Herefordshire schools. Although there is no financial saving to the Local Authority, distribution of the budget across other schools, and in particular the 'per pupil' element brings financial benefit to the new host school or schools in terms of their spending power. As pupils join classes already established with teachers and teaching assistants a higher proportion of the extra pupil funding can be spent of additional classroom support and curriculum resources.</p> <p>There would be a cost to the Local Authority in terms of transport provision to an alternative school or schools. This has been calculated at £22,000 per year. The rural nature of Herefordshire requires the Local Authority to spend around £5 million a year on</p>
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Devastating effect of closure on the community (56)	<p>Already lost village shop and post office. Most young families introduced to the Church through school. Danger of losing early years provision. Secure school would attract young families to Dilwyn village. Fall in house prices if school closes. Lose an institution at the heart of the community. Long term impact should be considered – wider impact on rural village communities. Retain school for housing expansion.</p>	<p>Some responses recognise that shops, post offices, pubs and schools are closing in villages; also that church congregations are aging and declining. This is a concern, but the village school is as susceptible to demographic change as any other facility or institution. As demography has changed over the decades, as rural based trades and jobs have declined and the population has migrated to more urban areas and to new trades and industries, so facilities, including schools across Herefordshire and across the country have closed. In this respect, Dilwyn is not unique.</p>
Adverse effects on current pupils who are doing well (16)	<p>Ofsted report recognising strengths. Views of pupils themselves. Concern about disrupting a happy group. Opportunities for children in the future lost.</p>	<p>If the school were to close the local authority and the diocese of Hereford would work with parents and pupils to identify a suitable school. The receiving schools would work closely with the pupils and parents to make the transitions as successful as possible, as they do with other pupils that join their schools.</p>
Closure was predetermined – consultation merely following process (24)	<p>Minority view, held by Governors on the Review Group, held under the Small Schools Policy was not reported.</p>	<p>The consultation document stated that the majority of the Review Group concluded that the school as a standalone entity is not viable. This clearly indicates that a minority felt that it was viable, although specific reference is not made to the minority view being held by governors on the Review Group.</p>

	<p>Bias of consultation document. Ofsted judgement is satisfactory – school not failing. Good SIAS judgement.</p> <p>Lobbying of Diocesan authorities by Children & Young People’s Directorate.</p> <p>Lobbying of Weobley Cluster schools after consultation period had ended.</p>	<p>The Ofsted judgement was reflected and acknowledged in the consultation document. The SIAS report was published later, but the judgement was acknowledged and accepted. The consultation document however was concerned with the future challenges that the school would face in raising its standards to good or outstanding. It was important that the consultation document reflected the significant concerns held by the Children & Young People’s Directorate and Hereford Diocese and to seek views on those concerns including on options to address them.</p> <p>The Hereford Diocese was represented on the Review Group since it began. The Children & Young People’s Directorate liaised with both Diocesan bodies in an open exchange of views on the evidence and consultation responses, including the proposal to federate with St Mary’s RC High School.</p> <p>Officers were invited by the Weobley Schools Cluster to attend a meeting of headteachers and chairs of governors on 14 May to discuss the implications for their cluster working in the light of the St Mary’s federation proposal, submitted during the consultation period. The Headteacher and Chair of Governors of Dilwyn were invited, but were unable to attend.</p>
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<p>Transport will be required and will have a negative effect on families and the environment (6)</p>	<p>Stated that families will have to make alternative arrangements, transport would be required whereas at the moment some pupils walk. No footpaths or cycle paths as alternative routes to other schools. Goes against national government objectives of environmental and sustainable living.</p>	<p>These are part of the considerations in determining the future of Dilwyn School and have been weighed against all the other factors involved. It is evident that families from the Dilwyn catchment do go to other schools and are able to make arrangements to do so. There is the ability to share transport amongst families and this does occur. Statutory transport entitlement will also be available.</p>
<p>Option of Federation was never going to be accepted. The proposal should be given time to work (51)</p>	<p>Federation with St Mary's was rejected mainly on grounds of financial viability owing to small pupil numbers. The issue of numbers would be the same for a federation with any school, so the Children & Young People's Directorate were never going to consider this option, only closure. There are a number of positive developments associated with an ecumenical approach. It is exciting and innovative and should be given time.</p>	<p>The Children & Young People's Directorate and Dioceses felt that the original business case to federate with St Mary's did not adequately address a number of concerns, including safeguarding arrangements, finance and pupil numbers. During the Review stage, the Children & Young People's Directorate and Hereford Diocese were proactive in engaging neighbouring schools to consider federation with Dilwyn.</p>
<p>Evidence presented for consultation was heavily biased towards closure (23)</p>	<p>The Children & Young People's Directorate claimed general disadvantages in terms of teaching and learning in small schools. This ignores evidence researched and collected by the National Association of Small Schools. Staff recruitment and retention.</p>	<p>As mentioned above, the Cabinet report of 12 July 2010 recognised the statistical evidence that small schools often produce markedly better results, but after adjusting for socio-economic factors, these differences are marginal. In terms of staff recruitment and retention, the Children & Young People's Directorate and the Hereford Diocese were drawing on very recent experience of small schools struggling</p>

	<p>Quality of teaching and learning – inferred standards and capacity to improve were unacceptable.</p>	<p>to retain and attract staff.</p> <p>In terms of the quality of teaching & learning, the consultation document reflected the Children & Young People’s Directorate and Hereford Diocese concerns about workloads, the opportunities for training and development and for peer support within the school setting. The very small numbers of pupils and the limited funding that results from this, minimises the number of staff that can be employed. This significantly impairs the ability of staff to learn from and support each other, and to take up training opportunities (both in terms of paying for training and to provide cover to go on training). The consultation document referred to the Ofsted inspection of Dilwyn C of E Primary School in January 2010 which judged the quality of teaching and learning as satisfactory. Although improvement had been made since the previous inspection in 2007, insufficient progress has been made overall to improve beyond a judgement of satisfactory. The Local Authority has been able to give the school support in this area, but both the Children & Young People’s Directorate and the Diocesan Board of Education were and remain concerned that as a standalone school, Dilwyn does not have the capacity necessary to make continued and sustained improvement to the standard of teaching and</p>
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	Safeguarding	<p>learning.</p> <p>The Children & Young People's Directorate and Hereford Diocese had, and still have, serious concerns around safeguarding, given the low staff numbers and implications for safeguarding arrangements if one or more members of staff are absent or needing to supervise pupils off site.</p>
Reaction to proposal for Federation was improper (18)	<p>Claim that the Children & Young People's Directorate has put effort into preventing a viable plan for federation.</p> <p>51 of the 67 responses felt that the proposal to federate with St Mary's should be given a chance to work.</p>	<p>The Children & Young People's Directorate, together with the Hereford Diocese and Archdiocese of Cardiff gave full and proper consideration to the specific federation proposal submitted by the Governors and St Mary's RC High School during the consultation period.</p> <p>See also the observations, below, of the Children & Young People's Directorate and Archdiocese of Cardiff on the revised proposal to federate, which was submitted in response to the statutory notice.</p>
Cabinet report was incomplete, inaccurate and biased. Numbers of pupils now and in the future will increase to enable a viable school and partnership. (23)	<p>Statement that past, present and future pupil numbers do not enable valid educational provision as a standalone entity. Past numbers did allow this until threat of closure.</p> <p>Availability of school places in the area is not a valid reason to close a rural school. A school should not be closed in order to fill</p>	<p>See comments above in response to 'Statutory guidelines have been ignored'.</p> <p>The availability of alternative school places is one of a number of 'key reasons' for the recommendation to close the school. It is an</p>

	<p>another school.</p> <p>View of the Archdiocese of Cardiff was not accurately represented. Archdiocese was supportive of the proposal to federate with St Mary's until the Children & Young People's Directorate persuaded the Anglican diocese of non-viability.</p> <p>Teaching and learning – general bias against small school.</p> <p>Solicited response from the Weobley cluster of schools.</p> <p>Dilwyn School has identified 13 children where the threat of closure was a significant factor in their parents' decision to choose other schools.</p>	<p>important factor that places are available at an alternative school or schools.</p> <p>Please see earlier comment under 'Closure was predetermined'</p> <p>Please see earlier comment under 'Children & Young People's Directorate and councillors believe standards of teaching and learning would be better in a larger school.'</p> <p>Please see earlier comment under 'Closure was predetermined'</p> <p>In response to the consultation, no parents living in the Dilwyn catchment, who had chosen other schools, stated threat of closure as a reason. This was also the case with a separate Parish Council questionnaire. The St Mary's RC High proposal states 16 children whose parents would consider Dilwyn if it federated with St Mary's. Of these only 3 are current primary age pupils, 5 for the 2011 intake, 1 for 2012, 2 for 2013 and 5 for 2014. It is unclear whether the school has asked all</p>
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	<p>Legal implications – the Cabinet report does not refer to statutory guidance – Closing a Maintained Mainstream School, which states that there is a presumption against closure of rural schools.</p>	<p>parents of preschool age children in the Dilwyn area, but the numbers quoted, even with the perceived attraction of federation with St Mary’s would see the school’s roll reduce further as higher numbers of pupil in the upper year groups transfer to secondary school. N. B. while St Mary’s quote 16 children, the Dilwyn Governors quote 19, with a target of 40, but no age range is quoted.</p> <p>The Cabinet paper refers to the legislation from which the statutory guidance is derived – Education & Inspections Act 2006. The specific considerations that a local authority must undertake in respect of a rural school are stated in the Community Impact section of the report.</p>
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The Governors of Dilwyn believe that Federation with St Mary's RC High School is "virtually certain to provide a sustainable future for Dilwyn School." The Governors recognise that "nothing is ever certain and plans can go wrong", but the Governors believe "there is a very strong probability that the revised business plan produced by St Mary's will succeed." The Governors have provided the following evidence, supported by other submissions, which is shown with the observations that have been part of the decision making process to inform the report and the recommendation to discontinue Dilwyn C of E Primary School.

Area	Evidence	View of the Children & Young People's Directorate and Archdiocese of Cardiff
Pupil numbers can be addressed	<p>Perceived attraction of partnering with St Mary's RC High School, which is popular with parents.</p> <p>Meet demand for Catholic places in the north of Herefordshire.</p> <p>Written statements from parents who would send their children to Dilwyn if it federated with St Mary's RC High School.</p>	<p>Only about one third of children living in the catchment area attend the school.</p> <p>Responses to the consultation and Parish Council questionnaire earlier this year identified no parents who had chosen other schools because of a perceived threat of closure for Dilwyn.</p> <p>The potential for 19 children to possibly attend Dilwyn would be phased over a number of years. The St Mary's RC High school proposal for federation states 16 - 3 are current primary age pupils, 5 for the 2011 intake, 1 for 2012, 2 for 2013 and 5 for 2014. The numbers quoted, even with the perceived attraction of federation with St Mary's would not see the school's roll increase significantly as higher numbers of pupil in some upper year groups transfer to secondary school. The Dilwyn Governors quote 19, with a target of 40, but no age range is quoted.</p> <p>Dilwyn School has been judged satisfactory</p>

		<p>by Ofsted, with its capacity to improve also satisfactory. The two nearest schools to Dilwyn, Weobley Community Primary and Pembridge C of E Primary which currently accommodate 28 pupils from the Dilwyn catchment area are judged by Ofsted to be good schools, with good capacity to improve. Other schools currently attended by children from the Dilwyn catchment area are judged either good or outstanding, with some parents opting for independent school education. The Local Authority and the Archdiocese of Cardiff question whether a significant number of families whose children have settled into other schools, and established friendship groups, would transfer their children, even with the possible attraction for some of a potential advantage in gaining a place at St Mary's R. C. High school at secondary transfer. Siblings would therefore be most likely to follow to the same schools.</p> <p>The Local Authority and Diocesan bodies recognise one aim of the proposed federation which would be to open up an opportunity for children of the Catholic faith to access a gospel based education in the north of the County. However the low number of Catholic baptisms in the north of the County suggests this would not increase pupil numbers significantly with an average total of just 5 baptisms a year being recorded between</p>
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		<p>2005 and 2009 in the Weobley/Kington and Leominster parishes. It cannot be assumed that all would choose to send their children of primary age to Dilwyn from this wide geographic area.</p> <p>Responses to the consultation felt that pupil numbers could rise again, quoting a shortage of primary school places in the West Midlands and possible housing development in Dilwyn. While parts of the West Midlands are experiencing greater demand for primary school places and in particular the urban conurbations, Herefordshire as a whole and the Dilwyn area in particular are not. The Parish Council is working with Herefordshire Council planners on a proposal to build 25 new homes, 50% of which would be affordable housing. The Council's planning documents identify a probable yield of fewer than 5 primary age pupils from such a development. While Dilwyn is identified as a Main Village in the Local Development Framework, any future housing is likely to be in proportion to its size, currently about 123 residential dwellings and will therefore not be significant enough to greatly increase pupil numbers in the catchment area.</p>
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<p>Costs can be reduced</p>	<p>Supply cover Administration Additional funding for additional pupils. Replacing retiring teacher with a Newly Qualified Teacher. Use St Mary's for building maintenance</p>	<p>There are some discrepancies in the Dilwyn budget figures used for the 3 year projections. 20% savings on supply is shown as £2,731pa but Dilwyn School has reduced its budget in 2010/11 to £7,920 so a 20% savings is only £1,584 - hence savings overstated by £1,147 per annum. Likewise savings on admin costs are shown as £1,955 pa but the 2010/11 budget only includes £1,288 again overstating by £667 per annum.</p> <p>The increase in pupils shows a rising income but does not adjust for any loss of small schools protection, for example, for 8 pupils this would be worth around £900.</p> <p>A substantial saving is shown by replacing a 0.74 UPS2 teacher by a 0.74 NQT. The cost of an NQT will rise each year and potentially rise back to the level of the UPS 2 teacher.</p> <p>Whilst all these are very small differences and total £2,714 these are the tolerances that the St. Mary's plan is working to.</p> <p>In addition, there are no recharges to St Mary's for supply, AST teachers (1 day) and management time for the St Mary's</p>
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		Headteacher and it is unclear what salary is proposed for the current Headteacher of Dilwyn in the new structure. The cost effectiveness of the proposed leadership team is questionable.
The administrative burden will be reduced	Single administrative function for both schools, including procurement.	This may produce some efficiencies, but it is not clear how this is intended to operate in practice and, as noted above, the financial saving is overstated in the proposal.
Teaching & learning can be greatly improved	<p>Consultancy available from Madley Primary School and the Wigmore Trust schools.</p> <p>Joint CPD and benefits from wider partnerships set up by Madley Primary.</p> <p>Curriculum development with Madley Primary.</p> <p>St Mary's Advanced Skills Teacher to provide additional support in literacy, science and the environment, local history etc.</p> <p>Specialism staff to provide support in maths and technology.</p>	While St Mary's lacks expertise, particularly in Key Stage 1, the involvement of Madley, Wigmore and St Joseph's would undoubtedly provide that expertise. The intention of these schools to provide long term advice and support is unquestionable and a fine example of the potential benefits of collaborative working. What is less clear from the proposal is how the capacity will be created to achieve this and what, if any, costs/recharges will be incurred. A formal federated or collaborative arrangement would increase confidence in the longevity of such arrangements, but this is not proposed to happen imminently, if at all.
Safeguarding can be assured	<p>Dilwyn staff appropriately trained.</p> <p>Identified person on Dilwyn site at all</p>	While all of these proposed arrangements are welcome, assurance will be needed

	<p>times. Appropriate St Mary's staff available in an emergency. Rapid reaction team in Dilwyn village. Expertise available from Madley Primary.</p>	<p>on how each will operate in practice. For example, the resource implication of ensuring an identified person on Dilwyn site at all times, the robustness of communication/availability arrangements for the rapid reaction team and St Mary's staff ability to get to Dilwyn site quickly.</p>
<p>The disadvantages of distance between schools can be easily mitigated</p>	<p>Broadband video link Minibuses Integrated communications systems.</p>	<p>Video links between school are seen as a possible solution to sharing teaching expertise, skills and resources, particularly between schools in rural areas. Minibuses would provide access to other schools and resources, but the journey time between St Mary's and Dilwyn is significant at 1 hour for a return journey, plus time at either end to get ready for the journey and to get to the appropriate facility. It is not envisaged that this could be used too often without seriously reducing classroom time for pupils. An integrated communication system would be essential.</p>
<p>Any short-term financial shortfalls can be dealt with by pledges of financial support from individuals and businesses in the area.</p>	<p>£14,000 in written pledges received. £20,000 claimed to be likely. Still many potential contributors to approach.</p>	<p>While such funds may help in the short term, the longer term financial plan is dependent upon increasing pupil numbers at the school. As stated above, this is a significant challenge and one which the business plan does not address sufficiently, for the reasons stated above.</p>